THE LATE POPE LEO XIII.

George Alfred Townsend's Sketch of His Useful Life.

EPOCHS IN THE REMARKABLE CAREER OF THE DECEASED PONTIFF.

His Influence Upon Religion and Education—A Christian Gentleman, a Superior Magistrate and a Beloved Head of the Church.

Few men have left a greater or more lasting impress upon the age in which they lived than did Leo XIII., who has just passed away at the Vatican, exhibiting in his closing hours such physical vitality, mental vigor, moral courage and spiritual serenity as come rarely in human experience.

Pope Leo's place in history will be with that of the greatest and most benignant of the Roman pontiffs. It may be doubted if any of those who wore before him the mantle of St. Peter ever succeeded in captivating the imagination and interest of the civilized world as did the late pope. None of the valiant old men of his generation—neither Gladstone nor Bismarck—made

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such a wonderful impression as did the aged Leo. He possessed a marvelous individuality, which was heightened by his remarkable vigor and tenacity in old age. At ninety, when he gave Benjamin Constant a sitting for his portrait, the French painter was astonished at the brilliancy of his intellect. Yet with serene poise and strength he passed on for three years more to his jubilee, retaining for more than a quarter of a century that papal power which, it was supposed, was conferred for only a short time upon a feeble old man in 1878. He proved one of the strongest in physical endurance as well as in mental qualities that had ever been elevated to the papal throne.

As the head of the Catholic church the achievements of Leo XIII. are memorable. Even those not in the Roman communion freely admitted his greatness, while to the devout Catholic he was the personification of goodness. He was both statesman and priest, and his views, like his ambitions, were of the widest. His services as papal nuncio at Brussels gave him that stamp of the diplomat which never left him. In close touch with the affairs of many nations, his extraordinary memory, his fresh and earnest interest in the on-goings of the world, made his contributions to passing history of peculiar significance and value.

In America the late pope seemed to take an especially vivid interest, which was evinced in wise counsels to his people in this country on many occasions. To the republican form of government he showed himself a good friend upon more than one occasion. In his encyclicals on socialism is seen how his sympathy for the struggling and aspiring masses was balanced by his fine sense of the necessary order and stability of society. His refined intellect, his simplicity of life, his unaffected piety, all exalted to eminence by his extraordinary career, made him an inspiring personage even to those who did not recognize him as a spiritual ruler and teacher, and Protestants as well as Catholics mourn his death.

The story of the pope is an exceedingly simple and pretty one. He has been—though the pontiff, as it is called, of the most ancient ecclesiasticism in western Europe—an excellent citizen of our later world. He has been a good magistrate, a superior pastor, a gentleman and, it may be added, a prince. He was a prince in nature before he was either cardinal or pope.

From the time he was elected pope the city of Rome has been in the occupation of the king of Italy and has indeed been the political capital of Italy, the laws of the kingdom paying no attention to the previous laws and formalities which the secular state supplanted. But the influence of the pope as a spirit of education and of light has extended to the most remote portions of the world.

Above all other popes, and somewhat beyond his own record in earlier life, Leo XIII. has been a liberal politician. He has hailed the future rather than deplored the loss of the past. He has been one of the captains in the movement for universal education and has striven to make education and morals confide in each other. Not a single scandal from Rome in his papacy has been conveyed to the world. He has shown a friendly disposition to the world and could himself take place in almost any learned faculty or congress and hold his own in general knowledge with scientists, belles-lettres men and doctors.

Elected pope in February, 1878, he was then almost sixty-eight years of age, and he had been for thirty-two years the archbishop of one quiet city, Perugia, which once belonged to the papal states, but stood high among the old Italian republics or feudalities for its painters and men of gifts. This region, generally called Umbria, produced the highest triumphs of art in Raphael. In Perugia and its province the archbishop was as distinctly the foremost citizen or subject as the late Phillips Brooks undoubtedly was in Boston or Henry Ward Beecher in Brooklyn.

He was born at a mountain town in the Apennines, not far from Rome, called Carpineti, on March 2, 1810. To this little place of about 5,000 people his ancestors had been expelled from Siena about 350 years before. They were nobles in Siena, but had taken part against their countrymen when the Medici of Florence resolved to conquer and annex Siena. This independent republic, inspired with passionate hatred against Florence, made a memorable defense, but the odds were too strong.

Retiring into the state of the church, the pope's family, named Pecci (pronounced Pechi), formed new friendships, and the pope's father was a count who either volunteered or was drafted into Napoleon's service when he overran Italy. The pope's mother was a countess, who brought property to her husband.

They lived in what is called a palace in Italy, a large building rising from the rocks, two stories and an attic high, with flowers and terraces about its base. It appears that the pope during all his life has known no want, but has enjoyed a private revenue such as a gentleman of noble descent would be apt to have in any country who had kept his estates.

He was born after the French republicans had overrun Italy and been everywhere victorious and the greatest change had taken place not only in the Italian people, but even in the priesthood.

The pope himself, Pius VII., had been taken captive from Rome to France and was only returned to Rome at the fall of Napoleon in 1814. He restored the Jesuits, who were the secular schoolmasters within the church, but they had fallen under the hostility of several of the kings and been for some time suppressed. Upon their return they opened schools and gave the city of Rome something of its old clerical and literary character.

In 1817 the late pope's mother took her sons to Rome and the next year put them at school at Viterbo, a city on a hill but a few hours' carriage ride from Rome. This lady belonged to one of the orders of the Franciscans and when she died was buried in their brown cloak and cord. Her death was nearly at the same time with that of Pius VII.

The next pope, Leo XII., branched out as an educator. The Jesuits' college was opened in Rome in 1824 with 1,400 students, and among these were the two Pecci boys, of whom Joseph was a Jesuit. He was three years older than his brother. These boys went home to their mountain town on holidays, and the pope was an active hunter and fowler in the mountains. Rome was to them like any American city to a family which lived in the neighboring country and spent the winters in the city.

The name of the pope was Joachim Vincent Raphael Lodovico Pecci. He always went by the name of Vincent Pecci until at a certain period after his mother's death, when he became generally known as Joachim Pecci.

He became fluent in the Latin and wrote verses and orations in it and gained prizes. After his mother's death he lived with his uncle in the Muti palace in Rome. He somewhat knew Pope Leo XII. and chose his papal name with reference to that prelate.

He matriculated in 1830, graduated a doctor of theology in 1832, which was the time that he adopted the name of Joachim, and he entered the diplomatic class in the university called Sapienza, or Wisdom, in Rome. Among his friends and classmates were such nobles as Duke Sforza of the old Milan lords.

He was acquainted with Leo, as well as with Pius VIII., who lived but a short time, and then came Gregory XVI., in whose household he was one of the prelates.

He first attracted special attention during the cholera in Rome in 1837, when he was twenty-seven years old. He had nerve in an unusual degree, and his intrepid services among the cholera stricken people marked him among the more timid ecclesiastics as a man who could be of use to them in the dangerous condition of the country.

Made a full priest in the Church of St. Stanislaus, in Rome, Joachim Pecci was made at the age of twenty-eight governor of Benevento, a small state in Naples about seven miles square and only a day's journey from that city. Benevento had given the title of Prince of Benevento to Talleyrand, the celebrated French diplomatist, who in his early life had been a Catholic bishop.

The little state was full of reactionary guerrillas and brigands. The young ruler went there under the general expectation that he would be the victim of violence. Fortunately for him, he was almost immediately taken ill with the typhoid fever, and his death was supposed to be certain. This calamity softened the nature of the people, and they began to talk about this intellectual young priest who had exposed his life in Rome to the pestilence. Instead of antagonizing him they formed processions and went to public prayers in his behalf, and when he recovered it was looked upon as in the nature of a miracle.

They were mistaken, however, as to his worldly force.

There lived in a mountain fastness in the state a celebrated brigand named Pasquale Colletta, who had a band of fourteen murderers, and they had committed every species of offense. The priest governor laid his plans well, and one day the people were surprised to see come into the town, manacled and under guard, the chief of the band and every one of his myrmidons. In spite of their threats, promises and penitence they were executed.

Pecci now turned his attention to the lawless nobles who had countenanced such trespasses, and when one of these undertook to browbeat him and threatened to go to Rome and have him recalled the governor said, "Marquis, before you get to the Vatican you shall pass through the castle of St. Angelo." This was the state prison at Rome, and its name was ominous.

A feeling grew that this young man had special powers with the pope. Evil doers hastened to get out of his territory or make their peace.

He searched the lawless castles, began to build good roads, examined and lowered the taxes, made the collection of the revenue effective, and thus spent nearly three years making an orderly state out of a most disorderly one.

Pope Gregory now recalled him to Rome and appointed him governor of Perugia, where he will always be remembered as one of the wisest men who ever took charge of her fortunes. This city stands near Assisi, where is the monastery founded by St. Francis. It was full of Mazzini's revolutionary societies.

The object the papal authorities had was the suppression of these plotting spirits by Pecci, but he commenced in a different way.

Finding that the city was on a high mound or cone above a plain or marsh and had a road to it so steep that no vehicle could climb it without the aid of many yokes of oxen, the new governor set to work and in twenty days built a graded road up the height, over which in a little while rode the pope, much to his wonder and satisfaction.

The pope was so delighted with his young engineer governor, then aged thirty-one, that he said as he left a number of presents to be distributed, "I will remember you, my friend, when I get to Rome."

In the meantime Pecci founded a savings bank in Perugia and himself subscribed largely to the stock and began to set up excellent schools. The people felt that a friend and not an enemy had come among them.

Just as he had accomplished remarkable things in that city the pope resolved to send him as nuncio, otherwise minister, to Belgium, which had not long before been separated from Holland by a revolution and created into a new monarchy. Belgium had only been free from Holland about thirteen years. The people were Catholics, while those of Holland had been Protestants. Other than church differences existed between them. The Dutch were unimaginative and penurious and hard taskmasters. The Belgians had an antiquity of turbulent freedom and loved the arts and joys.

At thirty-three Archbishop Pecci, as he now was, appeared in Brussels accredited to King Leopold, who was the uncle of the royal family of England. An interesting account of his gentle yet democratic intercourse is to be found in the "Life of Charles Lever," the novelist, who at that time lived in

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Brussels and was writing some of his novels. He and the future pope became warm friends. So did the king and queen take most cordially to the nuncio.

He busied himself mainly in rearing up the Catholic schools and universities of Belgium, which had gone into a decline. His acuteness on political affairs was such that Leopold one day said to him, "You are as clever a politician as you are a bright churchman."

Always moderate and always learning, Archbishop Pecci was also active for his church and raised money in Belgium to found a college in Rome to educate the priests of that country.

Before he returned to Rome in 1846 he visited London with letters to Victoria and Albert and was by them well entertained, and he mingled among the best people in England and took close observations upon the country. This species of intercourse no doubt broadened his mind and made him see that the modern world could not be reduced to the haggard outlines of Italy.

From London he went to France and paid a visit to Louis Philippe, who was dangerously near his fall.

When he got to Rome Pope Gregory was dying.

Pecci was well acquainted with Cardinal Feratti, who soon became Pius IX., and that pope made him archbishop of Perugia at the age of thirty-six. Nearly at the same time the new pope granted a general amnesty for political offenses and was for a time regarded as a man of liberal intentions.

It was fortunate for Archbishop Pecci that he could retire to a distance from Rome in the mountains toward Tuscany and exercise his prerogatives without becoming involved in the rising political passions at the Eternal City, where very soon Mazzini, Garibaldi and others revolutionized Rome and formed a triumvirate of dictators and had to stand a siege by the French, at the close of which the pope was so heartily frightened that he revoked his liberal dispositions.

Retired to a city of about 60,000 people, the archbishop of Perugia, as has been said, lived there thirty-two years, or down to the year 1878. He was a universal reader, and among the wise saints in the Catholic age he chose St. Charles Borromeo as a man to imitate, the giver of his riches to alms and education. He thereupon gave his mind to the study of education in Perugia.

He made up his mind in the first place to educate his clergy thoroughly and to see that their habits were industrious and pure. Next he set upon the education of the upper classes, many of whom were contemptibly illiterate. Finally he came down to the children.

At one time the revolutionary elements in Perugia arose, and a conflict took place between them and the papal troops, who were of all nations, Swiss, German, Irish, and even American, and the populace was worsted.

The archbishop surrounded himself with friends of like tastes with his own, favorable to education and sincerely desirous of seeing morals made voluntary. He had been received in the city, when he returned there the second time, with a magnificent demonstration. As the ruler, both ecclesiastic and civil, he inhabited the palace upon the public square, which had on one side of it the city hall and on the other the cathedral.

In 1834 he was made a cardinal, and this entitled him to take part in the selection of future popes.

Glancing back for a moment at these dates, we will see that the pope was born in the year after Gladstone, that he became a full priest near the close of General Jackson's administration and that he became archbishop of Perugia at the time of our Mexican war.

His habits did not differ at any time. He was remarkably laborious, of a spare frame, with a high, capacious forehead, a large mouth, a full, long and expressive nose and an expression of thorough refinement, purity and acuteness.

Being a nobleman of the best class of Italian descent and of a nation immemorially ardent for knowledge and loving the arts, he was also destitute of sourness and had convictions without being opinionated.

None could impeach his private life. He was ever accessible to his priests and to those people who required him as a spiritual friend, but he also had high spirit and when browbeaten disclosed something like a military power within, and he could use indignant words. He was too worldly wise to be cheated, too discreet to commit himself in either word or deed except as his judgment and conscience were touched, and after the Italians in 1860 overran his state they found that he was a difficult man to handle in that he kept on the side of intelligent public opinion.

In short, he was a pope in spirit, representing the antiquity and authority of the church long before it was probable that he would fill the pontifical chair. He rose to this distinction at last by having deserved it.

Though it is probable that he was not unmindful of the honor and influence of that great office, he knew too well that to reach it in this dangerous age he must deserve it by a combination of character, of courage and of wisdom.

In 1806 the French troops were withdrawn from Rome, and the pope was left to such an army as he could himself create. The Italians, however, six years previously had overrun Sicily and Naples, annexed Tuscany and other states, and finally Venice, and were determined to occupy the papal states.

At this time Cardinal Pecci addressed the priests in words which should be common to all churches, saying:

"The moral conduct of the priests is the mirror into which the people look to find a model for their own demeanor. Every shadow, every stain, is remarked by the vulgar eye, and the mere shadow is enough to make the people lose their esteem of priestly worth. It is impossible that a priest who lays himself open to such reproaches or suspicions, who has the name of being self indulgent, interested and of irregular living, should give forth that fragrance of a pure life, that sweet odor of Christ, which witnesses to our worth and to our doctrine. The two great means which the Divine Master declares to be indispensable in our high ministry are holiness and knowledge."

In 1869 he made an effort with the king of Italy to rescue poor clerical students from the military conscription. "The burden of military service," he said, "must inevitably fall on all young men who have devoted themselves to the clerical career. We are deeply saddened by this; we are frightened by the thought that so many parishes will ask us for pastors while we shall have none to give them; that so many pious populations will ask for the food of Christian instruction and the comfort of the sacraments, and that no one will be found to minister to them, and that, such a state of things continuing, there is nothing to prevent religion from dying out in these country places for the very lack of hands to cultivate it."

The government now sequestrated nearly all ecclesiastical property, seizing upon the residences of the bishops and the church revenues and making exceptions where it saw fit.

At one time bloodshed was threatened in Perugia, when the archbishop came upon the scene and by his courageous and calm interposition prevented a conflict. He pardoned all the malcontents who had been put down in 1859. When the Swiss garrison of Perugia undertook in 1860 to resist the Sardinians the cardinal in vain attempted to prevent a battle. He was unable to prevent the execution of one of his officials, who was shot by a court martial for having borne arms.

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